

The Director of Central Intelligence

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7 November 1977

Dear Joe,

Just read your column on the Helms issue and thought it was very balanced and informative.

You mentioned me in it, stating that I've "...cut back drastically on the size of the CIA's covert staff." Let me only make it clear that I have cut back only in the Headquarters overhead. There is no intent to cut back the overseas arm that does the clandestine collection and covert action. In short, your statement is technically correct, but I did want you to know that it is not my intent to reduce the net effectiveness of the clandestine/covert organization. In fact, I think that pruning the excesses from the Headquarters overhead will strengthen our clandestine/covert capabilities.

All the best to you and Anne.

Yours,



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Helms case skirts secrecy issue

Preserving democracy and spies too: analysis

By Joseph C. Harsch

Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

The immediate case of Richard Helms, master spy, vs. the U.S. Senate is now resolved in the only way it could be resolved — by a legalistic compromise. He has pleaded *nolo contendere*, meaning he does not choose to contest the charge. His case will not now go to trial. The judge had still to decide on a sentence at this writing.

Left unresolved, and perhaps never to be resolved, is how to reconcile the principles of democratic government with clandestine intelligence operations. Former Central Intelligence Agency director Helms himself will not be prosecuted for failing to disclose in public to the Senate what the CIA actually did in Chile. But does this mean that the CIA in Washington will never again operate clandestinely against a foreign government? And does it mean that a future director of Central Intelligence will never again fail to disclose all he knows about such operations to the Senate in public?

In theory, this sort of thing is not likely to happen again soon. New arrangements for congressional oversight exist. And the disclosure of past CIA activities has given clandestine operations a bad name. Adm. Stansfield Turner, the new director of Central Intelligence, has cut back drastically on the size of the CIA's covert staff. The general climate of the times is such that nothing like the operation in Chile is likely to be attempted soon again, if ever.

The facts of the Helms case as now known are as follows:

In 1970 the government in Washington was unhappy about the impending election to the presidency of Chile of Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens, an avowed Marxist. The

White House, acting through the National Security Council channels which operated at that time, instructed the CIA to do what it could do by nonmilitary means to prevent the election of Mr. Allende.

In 1973 a Senate committee investigated reports that the CIA had conspired with the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation (ITT) against the Allende cause. Mr. Helms, then director of CIA, was asked questions about CIA activities in Chile. He denied knowledge of covert CIA activities in Chile in 1970 or later.

It now is known that the CIA did, in fact, spend about \$8 million in support of anti-Allende political activities in Chile, although apparently not in collusion with ITT. The Allende government was overthrown in a counter-revolution in September, 1973.

Perjury charge sought

The Senate committee headed by Sen. Frank Church (D) of Idaho contended that Mr. Helms's testimony in 1973 amounted to perjury and demanded that the Department of Justice bring him to trial on a charge of perjury.

On Oct. 31, Mr. Helms, now retired from public service, appeared in the federal district court of Judge Barrington D. Palmer, along with officials of the U.S. Department of Justice and entered his plea of *nolo contendere*. The Department of Justice recommended that there be no prison sentence. White House spokesman Jody Powell said that this action on the Helms case "upholds the law but also serves the interests of national security."

By upholding "the interests of national security" Mr. Powell presumably means that no precedent has been set which would push any future CIA director or agent to disclose in answer to Senate questions all he knows about clandestine matters which he has taken an oath to keep secret.

Secrecy oath dilemma

Mr. Helms, of course, knew all about CIA operations in Chile. He had authorized those operations on instructions from his own superiors at the White House. He was a commissioned officer of the government of the United States acting on the orders of his superior officer, the President. But these operations were intended to be clandestine and secret. His own oath of office required him to avoid disclosing his knowledge of such operations.

What does any spy do under such conditions?

Perhaps the answer to the many quandaries disclosed by the whole CIA story is that there should be a system of congressional supervision which avoids a repetition of what happened to Mr. Helms. If the Congress, through its own oversight arrangements, is satisfied that the CIA is not acting outside the area of proper authority, then there would be no occasion to summon the CIA director to ask him questions which he cannot answer without violating his oath of office and uncovering clandestine operations.

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